



News Release

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HUMANITARIAN AIRDROPS SURPASS 100 FLIGHTS, 1.6 MILLION HDRS

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany - As anti-Taliban forces make tremendous strides in gaining control of Afghanistan, U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster IIIs continue to airdrop humanitarian daily rations to starving Afghans.

Nearly six weeks into the airdrop, 111 sorties have been flown from here delivering nearly 1.6 million of the culturally sensitive packets of food and other relief supplies that have helped sustain refugees in their war torn country since Oct. 7.

According to Joseph J. Collins, deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Affairs, this is the first time the United States has engaged in a war in a country that was already in the middle of a full-blown humanitarian crisis.

This crisis was brought about by a generation of war, four years of drought, and a century of underdevelopment, according to Collins.

"This has made humanitarian assistance to distressed populations an integral part of the Defense Department's overall policy," said Collins. "It has also made very close coordination and cooperation among federal agencies, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations -- the NGOs that we hear about so much -- it's made that cooperation mandatory."

Even before the current humanitarian airdrops began, the United States was the largest aid donor to Afghanistan. The total value of U.S. assistance from all sources -- DOD, Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development -- in the last two fiscal years is well over \$400 million.

Collins recently briefed the media on DOD's role in providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

"The DOD role in all of this is to support the State Department and U.S. AID, when that makes sense, and to provide unique capabilities where there are special needs," Collins said. "And that brings me to the first major subject -- what DOD has done in Afghanistan.

"The first success was in dropping the HDRs," Collins acknowledged. "To date, we've dropped, either by flutter method or in containers, about 1.6 million daily rations, each of which is enough to sustain a person with a day's worth of calories. Recently, we have been dropping about 35,000 a day. At the high, that number was about 70,000 per day."

Collins also talked about humanitarian relief expanding beyond just HDRs.

"The second success we've had here is in providing critical airlift support to U.S. AID on what people refer to as the wholesale level," Collins said. "At AID's request, we have lifted into Pakistan and Turkmenistan 40,000 blankets, 200 metric tons of high-energy biscuits, a ton of sugar, and 100 rolls of plastic sheeting for shelters. More of these missions are currently in the planning stage."

However, none of this aid would have been possible without the successful teamwork of all the agencies involved.

"Our third success has been in planning and coordination," Collins said. "And this is the success really that has enabled the other two. We have coordination centers in Islamabad and (MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.) that enable the U.N., selected nongovernmental organizations, the coalition partners, and (U.S. Central Command) to talk directly to each other."

According to Collins, planning efforts for the future are also in high gear. Coalition partners in NATO are stepping up allied support for the humanitarian effort. DOD is working hard with the coalition partners, the State Department, U.N. agencies and the NGOs in New York, at MacDill AFB, and in Islamabad on plans for improving our humanitarian work over the winter and our efforts at reconstruction. These tasks will be much easier now, now that we have friendly forces in Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif.

Collins also acknowledged that since the situation is changing, he believes the military aspects of aid probably are going to be less than they were, and that civilian aid agencies will resort to much more familiar tactics such as trucking food in and setting up feeding stations.

However, he sees the HDR airdrops continuing for the short run.

"We'll continue to drop the HDRs, and what you're likely to see from the DOD humanitarian efforts is a gradual shift from dropping HDRs into more wholesale support for U.S. AID and U.N. agencies, and also the provision -- or at least the management -- of certain services that will be needed to get the country back up and running," Collins said.

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